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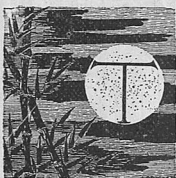
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CLOTHING IN JAPAN.

BY WILLIAM E. CURTIS.



modern dress goods. The silks used in making the beautiful kimonos and obis worn by the women here—like those you see in all Japanese pictures—are very narrow, often less than twelve inches wide, and the most artistic and skillful weavers will not change their looms or their habits. Therefore the best silk fabrics of Japan are not shipped abroad.

The obis—the sashes which the Japanese women wear—are the most beautiful fabrics woven in Japan and are the pride of the women. A Japanese belle regards her obi as a European woman does her diamonds, and although her wardrobe costs very little compared with that of her sister across the sea, two-thirds of its value will be invested in her obi. These precious brocades absorb the most artistic patterns that the designers of Japan produce. They are as thick as leather and as soft as crepe. It is amazing how the weavers can produce a combination of gold thread and silk that glistens like metal but is as pliable as gauze. The obi always comes four yards and a half long and nine inches wide, and you can buy them at any price between \$3 and \$300. It is said that some of those in the wardrobes of the women of the upper cult in the old feudal times carried as much as \$500 worth of pure gold in their threads.

The price of embroideries, such as were used years ago in the palaces of the Diamyos or in the Shinto and Buddhist temples—masses of silks and gold as thick as an Axminster carpet and large enough for a portiere or a bedspread, which represent years of labor and the most artistic skill—can be bought for fifty or sixty yen, or half that value in our money. Friezes of the choicest brocades, heavy with gold and silken figures, two feet wide and twenty feet long, representing in their designs historical and mythological scenes, can be had for twenty-five or thirty yen; and smaller pieces, such as will answer for upholstering chairs or table-spreads, or sofa pillows, you can buy for \$2 or \$3 each. When such things get to New York they cost a great deal of money, and the wonder is why some enterprising merchant does not invade the interior of Japan and pick up a large stock of them.

The value of silver has made no difference in the cost of labor or materials here, but imported goods are about twice as high as they used to be. For example, one would formerly get an evening suit of the best English diagonal goods for thirty yen, when that sum represented about \$25 in gold, but now you have to pay forty yen or forty-five, which represents about the same value. There is no difference in the cost of making, but the price of the material has doubled with the depreciation of silver. You can have an ordinary business suit made to order for \$15 or \$18 in gold that would cost you \$50 or \$60 in the United States. You can buy a pair of

trousers for \$3 or \$4 such as you would pay \$10 or \$12 for in New York or Chicago. The difference is in the low price of labor and the small profit with which the merchants here are satisfied. Tailors are paid from twelve to twenty sen a day, which is equivalent to six and ten cents in our money, and if a clothing merchant makes a net profit of fifty or seventy-five cents on a suit of clothes he is well contented.

The Japanese are good tailors, but the Chinese are better, and therefore have the larger portion of the business here. There are one or two English tailors who charge higher prices and are said to be more reliable, but they do not do any better work. The Chinamen are excellent fitters, and will make a suit just the way you want it if you will be patient in explaining the details. You can take them an old suit of clothes and they will duplicate it exactly, so far as the cut and the fit are concerned.

The same is true of women's clothing. The Chinese and Japanese tailors will make a cloth suit of the best English material for \$30 or \$40 that would cost \$150 in New York and \$75 or \$80 in London. The prices for all sorts of English clothing here are about thirty per cent. less than in London or Paris. If you give a Chinese tailor a London or New York tailor-made dress he will duplicate it as accurately as he does a pair of trousers.

Ordinary underclothing is quite as high as it is in New York, for they are just beginning to make it here. There is a factory in Tokio, however, where you can have silk undergarments woven to your measure for about half the London prices. A suit of very light gauze of pure silk costs eight yen, or \$4 (gold). A suit of very heavy pure silk will cost twenty yen, or \$10. You would pay \$12 and \$20 for the same thing in London. The difference is in the weight of the silk used. They charge you so much a pound for it and so much for the labor of knitting. The same company will make gentlemen's hose of the best Japanese silk for from fifty to seventy-five cents (gold), according to the weight of silk in them. The same quality of ladies' hose costs about twice as much, but the price of everything of this kind depends upon the weight of silk consumed.

Most of the hosiery and underwear knitted in Japan is made in this one shop with German machinery, operated by women and young girls, whose wages average eleven cents a day in our money. This is much higher than the ordinary factory operatives that you find in Japan. Most of them have to be satisfied with less than ten cents. At Osaka the other day I saw a great cotton factory filled with women of all ages tending spindles and looms, and showing marvellous dexterity, not one of whom received more than nine cents a day (gold) for twelve hours' work. They begin at six o'clock in the morning and work till six at night, with an intermission of half an hour at nine, twelve and three o'clock. And the wages of the superintendent of the mill were only \$20 a month, the same salary that is paid the pastor of the native Presbyterian church in that city.

The wages of seamstresses are even lower, and it seems almost wicked to accept the work they are so poorly paid for. I had a silk kimono the other day—the garment like the toga of a Roman senator, or the gown of a justice of the Supreme Court—which all Japanese wear. The silk cost \$3.40 (gold), and the merchant charged me fifteen sen, or seven and a half cents, for the making. I suppose it was an all-day's job for some seamstress, and the merchant must have added a commission for himself, or a "squeeze," as they appropriately call it here.



A JAPANESE DRAPERY. BY F. PATTERSON.